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CityLinks

A BEST PRACTICES CASE STUDY: THAILAND

SUMMARY

Environmental management is a major challenge facing municipalities in Thailand. As of 2005, all Thai cities had developed five-year plans for environmental management, as required by the central Thai government; however, many cities remained ill-prepared to meet the 2006 implementation deadline. Their plans needed adequate financial resources, defined priorities, implementation schedules, and programs for public involvement. Overcoming the many environmental issues – urban water supply, wastewater treatment, and solid waste disposal – presented onerous challenges.



To help address these issues, the cities of Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Phuket, and Portland, Oregon entered into a two-year CityLinks partnership in 2003.

The Partnership had three central objectives: (1) to strengthen municipal environmental management; (2) to improve public service delivery; and (3) to encourage democratic participation from citizens in environmental management. To accomplish these objectives, the initiative promoted downtown redevelopment and sought to improve environmental protection measures through new financial management measures (e.g. increasing fees for wastewater services).

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During an initial trip to Portland, representatives from the three Thai cities learned about Portland's financial planning processes, redevelopment projects, and action plan development process. After this trip, a delegation from Portland visited Thailand to review the progress of project planning and implementation, and to provide guidance and support. The Thai delegates returned to Portland in mid-2004 to discuss and revise their action plans and learn about public participation tools and methods. Throughout 2004 officials from all three cities held community meetings about the proposed redevelopment projects, collected data, and developed communication materials about increasing wastewater fees. In 2005 the cities continued to develop their waste-water fees program and implement the public participation techniques into their programs.

On September 8th, 2005 the team held a conference entitled "Challenges in City Management: The Lessons Learned from the CityLinks Program." The conference highlighted lessons learned by three Thai cities – Khon Kaen, Chiang Mai, and Phuket – that have worked over the past two years with experts from the City of Portland, Oregon to develop and incorporate public participation processes for city development projects, introduction of waste-water fees, and urban re-development projects. The second day of the conference featured a Train-the-Trainer workshop presented by a small training team from the city of Khon Kaen. This workshop launched the Public Participation Training Technique (and a written manual) developed by the cities participating in the CityLinks project. The training module will eventually be marketed all over Thailand to train municipalities on the art of incorporating public participation in their decision making processes.

KEY DATES

May 2003 – CityLinks City Selection

Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Phuket were selected as the cities to participate in the CityLinks partnership.

September 2003- First Exchange to Portland

With all three Thai mayors in attendance, the first meeting between the Thai delegation and the Portland team: (1) clarified and refined the action plans for the three Thai cities; and (2) conducted a first round of training in public involvement principles and techniques.

October 2003 – September 2004 – Community and Stakeholder Meetings

Community and stakeholders meetings on the improvement of the riverside, canal reclamation, downtown area, and sustainable environmental management through sound financial practice were organized by the city of Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Phuket.

June 2004 – Exchange to Portland involving Key Thai Nationals

A delegation of Thai staff involved in the day-to-day implementation of the projects in the three cities traveled to Portland to follow-up on the progress on the three cities' efforts and conduct public participation training sessions. At this point in the exchange, the Thai teams and the Portland team had developed a strong rapport and were able to work closely together with trust, humor and enthusiasm. This was a significant milestone as the ultimate success of the partnership was built in large part on the strong bonds developed at this exchange.

May 2-6, 2005 – Development of Public Participation Manual

Representatives from the City of Portland worked with the City of Khon Kaen to produce a manual on public participation techniques. The Portland team also provided a training workshop for Khon Kaen officials and the City's training team to prepare them for a training session following the *CityLinks Lesson Learned Conference*.

September 8-9, 2005 - Conference on "Challenges of City Management Lessons Learned from the CityLinks Program"

The Conference on "Challenges of City Management: Lessons Learned from the CityLinks Program" was held to highlight accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned as a result of the partnership program between the cities of Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Phuket and Portland. Following the conference, a one-day training session on public participation techniques was held for participants from cities around Thailand. The manual on "Public Participation Techniques for Local Governments", as a product of the CityLinks partnership program, was produced to be distributed at the conference.

SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

Most environmental planning efforts are “sold” to the public rather than developed through an inclusive process. As a result, it is much more difficult to take necessary and politically difficult actions. At the same time, cities continue to struggle with budgeting and financial management, as systems are generally weak and public involvement minimal. As a result, water, wastewater, and solid waste are provided at highly subsidized rates. While the Thai central government does not grant cities the necessary financial freedom to cover their costs for environmental services, most cities don’t charge up to the amount that is allowed for these services.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

Encourage locals and officials to adapt and understand participatory processes of engaging citizens in developing and implementing environmental and development projects. This was a priority established by the relatively new Thai constitution, and evolved in to a goal shared by the three Thai cities. Portland was selected as a good partner city because of their experience and expertise in public participation.

Improve environmental conditions along the proposed canals in Chiang Mai and Phuket, and in the old downtown district of Khon Kaen through the planning and design phases for all three municipalities for each redevelopment project.

Establish sound financial management initially through the establishment of a rate-based waste-water fees system. Through revenue from wastewater fees, cities can fund other projects related to bringing about better environmental conditions and improving the quality of life for their citizens.

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective: Improve environmental management through prudent financial policies and promote consistent processes in city redevelopment.

Strategy: As established in 2003, the focus of the partnership was three-fold. First, each city was responsible for developing and implementing a redevelopment project: (1) the Ping Riverside Redevelopment Project in Chiang Mai; (2) the Bang Yai Canal Reclamation Project in Phuket; and (3) the Old Town /Rama Theater Redevelopment Project in Khon Kaen. Second, the three cities worked to improve environmental management by developing sounder financial practices, particularly by setting and then charging a fee for treating wastewater. Finally, each city used a variety of formats to inform the public about activities and conducted one or more public meetings. The cities were responsible for identifying an overall project manager, defining roles and responsibilities, developing internal and external communication plans, and developing public involvement strategies.

The process establishing a rate based system for waste water fees was as follows:

1. Experts from Portland, ICMA, and US-AEP worked with the cities to understand all the tasks required when implementing a rate-based system.
2. The cities were tasked with developing of a rate-based model suitable for their given context
3. The concepts of fees for services as well as the polluter pays principle were introduced to the public through public meetings, brochures, and school events.
4. Billing and collection policies were developed and implemented.
5. Public awareness was raised about how rate revenues were being used to build, operate, maintain, and expand systems.

Throughout the partnership, the cities improved the way they interacted with citizens and encouraged linkages among various stakeholders (e.g. educational institutions, NGOs, and other public and private sectors of the community). They also organized public meetings and executed public relations campaigns to enhance public involvement and strengthen public support.

Finally, a conference "Challenges of City Management: Lessons Learned from the CityLinks Program" was held on September 8, 2005 in Bangkok to highlight accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned through the partnership. Over 150 participants from municipalities, NGOs, and the private sector attended.

The techniques of public participation process were shared by the city of Khon Kaen through the development of a public participation manual and training program "Public Participation Techniques for Local Governments". Following the conference, the initial training session on public participation techniques was held for 38 participants from cities around Thailand. More training sessions are planned to continue even after this partnership is completed.

MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES

2003

- Study tours, exchanges, and workshops (\$40,000)
- EPSG Fund exchanges/ workshops (\$ 22,000)

Total: \$62,000

2004

- Study tours, exchanges, and workshops (\$45,000), Implement Component 2 (\$10,000), Support a local counterpart institution (such as the Municipal League of Thailand) (\$5,000) Total: \$60,000
- Exchange funds will supplement funds as needed for the CityLinks projects (and will pay for a Thai delegation to attend the annual GFOA Conference in June, 2004) (\$15,000)
- Cost Share Three participating Thai cities: (\$30,000)

Total: \$105,000

2005

- Travel, trainings, workshops, and capacity building activities (\$32,000).
- Cost Share: Three Cities Partners, Municipal League of Thailand: Direct in-kind contribution (\$9,000; 28% of obligated/contract funding).

Total: \$41,000

PROCESS

US-AEP helped to facilitate a long-term partnership between Portland, Oregon and three Thai cities: Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Khon Kaen. This partnership focused on strengthening municipal management, improving public service delivery, and encouraging democratic participation. In addition, the three Thai cities were responsible for organizing activities to engage public participation and increase public support for their main projects and sub-projects.

The participating Thai cities selected two sub-projects to be undertaken under this project, including (1) the improvement of the downtown area and (2) sustainable environmental management through sound financial practice. The role of the partnership was assist the three Thai cities in developing mechanisms based on a public participation concept to increase public engagement in the two sub-projects as well as to strengthen collaboration between the municipalities on such issues.

To facilitate implementation of the project, project managers from each city were selected to design the implementation plan, select a project team, and facilitate coordination among the cities, Portland, and US-AEP. Mayors of each city were involved to provide overall support. Links between a wide spectrum of citizens and community members (e.g. educational institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other public and private sectors of the community) were encouraged through various events such as public meetings and public relations campaigns within each city. The Municipal League of Thailand (MLT), a well respected organization among local municipalities in Thailand, was invited to

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provide additional support for the final Lessons Learned Conference. Their involvement increased the outreach of the conference.

Various problems occurred that hampered the complete implementation of the projects, such as political and managerial problems, lack of adequate budget allocations, and uncontrollable factors (e.g. The Asian Tsunami). As well, some project managers failed to follow through with project implementation due to a lack of ownership (not assuming responsibility), insufficient authority within the chain of command to accomplish necessary tasks, and a lack of human and financial capacity to complete tasks. The allocation of an adequate budget for each city was complicated by (1) negotiations with the central government to distribute funds, (2) negotiations with the treasury department for land, and (3) in Phuket, finding the political and human capital to get the project completed was difficult as tsunami recovery slowed progress and redirected funds for project implementation.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

The results achieved through its initiative varied widely among the cities. While all of the cities held some form of a public meeting for both the redevelopment project and the rate making fees, only Khon Kaen truly implemented and embraced the public participation process and incorporated it into their ongoing management structure.

The city of Khon Kaen held regular meetings to discuss the rate making and redevelopment projects. Due to the diligence of the project team, dedication from the Mayors office, acceptance from the community, and a realistic project size – Khon Kaen achieved significant progress. Both the redevelopment and rate making projects are in the implementation phase. The redevelopment project has been approved by the community and the city is currently bidding for contractors. The rate making project continues to be successful, after the identification of key stakeholders and a series of public/ stakeholder meetings the city has received the commitment from the stakeholders on the rate fees. Although not implemented yet, the city will phase in rate fees by stakeholder groups (i.e. start with hotels and industry, eventually add private business, residential etc) and plans to start changing industries and hotels are set to begin shortly.

Khon Kaen will continue to use the public participation techniques for development projects. The current management is highly supportive, and citizen council meetings occur regularly, on average once per month, depending on project needs.

The city of Phuket faced a significant challenge in the aftermath of the Tsunami; however, even with a change in priorities and government funds stretched thin – the city was still able to achieve results. Although they have no immediate plans to adopt waste water fees, the city has begun an aggressive redevelopment project that will continue to grow in the foreseeable future.

The City of Chang Mai has held meetings for both sub-projects, and they understand the complexities involved with the establishment of a waste water fee and implementing a redevelopment project. However, their efforts have been complicated by budget constraints due to the redirection of central government funds to Tsunami affected areas; consequently, the future of their projects remain uncertain.

SUSTAINABILITY

The City of Khon Kaen has gained valuable knowledge and training from the City of Portland and now seeks to assist other municipalities to engage their communities using methods and practices learned from Portland. Through the development of a public participation manual and the development of a “Train the Trainer” program, Khon Kaen will assist other municipalities struggling to engage the community to better understand the need and benefits of citizen participation. The City of Khon Kaen will serve as a national example and trainer of citizen participation.

LESSON LEARNED

Project Size: One key factor that contributed to Khon Kaen’s success was the scope of project the city chose. They picked to complete a small but manageable project that falls within the constraints of their local budget and human capacity. Both Chaing Mai and Khon Kaen are in the wings waiting for further progress because they are dependent on funds from the central government and other organizations.

Initial Stakeholder Analysis: The city of Khon Kaen identified all key stakeholders before the implementation process. They involved the stakeholders (hotels, industries, citizens) at all stages of the rate making project and was able to negotiate acceptable fees and time table as well as identify what each stakeholder was capable and willing to contribute in terms of time, fees and technology.

Select the right people: The traditional management structure in Thailand is hierarchically structured; therefore, it is necessary to not only identify the right key participants who will implement the day to day activities (project managers, coordinators, staff) but it is equally important to engage high level officials to provide the necessary support. In some cities the implementing project managers lacked the political clout necessary to complete the work.

TRANSFERABILITY

The CityLinks Thailand Program grew out of the partnership between Rayong, Thailand and Portland, Oregon. That partnership was concerned with financial management, environmental management and citizen participation. Originally, it was hoped that the lessons learned from that partnership would be replicated through CityLinks. Unfortunately, the Mayor was not re-elected and the momentum for that component could not be sustained. The partnership did provide for the creation of a 5 year budget forecasting model, assisted the city to implement policies such as a balanced budget, increased citizen participation as the community through citizen task forces were involved in both the financial management and environmental management components.

The CityLinks model grew from the Resource Cities Program that partnered usually one international city with a US partner. From this program, US-AEP realized that often it is better to develop a program where the US partner is working with a consortium of cities to create a network for the cities to discuss and see best practices and to learn from each other's experience and expertise. It was important that the three Thai cities have similar priorities so that the technical assistance is more targeted.

Portland has been through the ringier with public involvement on planning projects in Portland, so the city was able to share their successes and failures, with some insight about what went wrong in the failures. The trust developed with the Thai teams allowed for a fairly candid exchange.

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